



January 22, 2019

Dear Member of Congress,

The undersigned organizations representing healthcare providers, patients, public health experts, workers, people of faith, and consumers are committed to advancing public health and promoting access to affordable medicines. Access to affordable healthcare and medicines is one of few demands that now unites the American public.

We write to you today with concern that provisions currently included in the proposed NAFTA 2.0 (referred to by the Trump administration as the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement) would entrench and expand prescription drug monopoly protections, thwart competition and thus undermine efforts to expand access to affordable medicines.

Today, high prescription drug prices force people across the United States to choose whether to take the medicines they need, or, instead, to ration or simply go without needed treatments in order to be able pay for other necessities like food and shelter. Nearly one-in-four Americans report that they or another family member have not filled a recent prescription because of cost.<sup>i</sup> Not being able to afford needed medicines is causing preventable suffering and death.<sup>ii</sup> These day-to-day impacts of high medicine prices are driving the national demand for reform. High drug prices that force patients to ration or go without needed medicines also result in increased health care costs both for consumers and government programs.<sup>iii</sup>

NAFTA 2.0 includes terms that would lock in place existing U.S. policies that have led to high medicine prices, undermining the authority of this and future Congresses to implement important reforms to expand generic and biosimilar competition, lower medicine prices and expand access. This is the case because NAFTA 2.0 includes expansive terms relating to patent and other non-trade policy matters to which the U.S. Congress will be obliged to conform our domestic policies. Once implemented, changes to the NAFTA 2.0 terms would require consensus among all of the signatory countries. And, if Congress enacted policies that conflict with NAFTA 2.0 terms, the United States would become subject to trade sanctions – tariffs on U.S. exports – unless and until Congress' actions were reversed.

The current text of NAFTA 2.0 mandates a minimum 10-year marketing exclusivity period for new biologic medicines, which includes many of the critical new treatments for cancer and heart disease and even vaccines. Absent competition, corporations routinely price these products at more than one hundred thousand dollars per patient per year. Members of the U.S. House of Representatives and the U.S. Senate have introduced legislation<sup>iv,v</sup> that would spur biosimilar competition in the United States by decreasing biologic marketing exclusivity to seven years. Reducing the U.S. biologics exclusivity period from the current 12-year term to seven years would save patients and taxpayers billions of dollars. Congressional enactment of this pro-health, cost-cutting reform, which would more fairly balance consumer and industry interests, would violate the terms of NAFTA 2.0 as currently drafted and thus could subject the United States to tariff sanctions.

Further, NAFTA 2.0 would lock the United States into:

- policies that extend patent terms for perceived delays in patent examinations and FDA reviews,
- marketing exclusivities that prevent competition even after a medicine's patent term expires, and
- requirements to provide secondary patents that facilitate patent "evergreening," which extends monopoly protections well beyond 20-year patent terms without any increased therapeutic benefits for patients.

Additionally, NAFTA 2.0 includes rules regarding procedures for pharmaceutical reimbursement decisions that prescription drug manufacturers may argue entitle them to on-going influence over Medicare decision-making processes with respect to which products are covered and how much to reimburse for those products.<sup>1</sup>

Expansive patent and marketing exclusivity rules are some of the major factors that have resulted in U.S. consumers and the U.S. government routinely paying more for prescription drugs than people and governments in other countries throughout the world. Locking the United States into the policies that have led to high medicine prices here will not remedy our problem, nor will trying to impose these U.S. policies on Mexico and Canada through NAFTA 2.0. The negative impact on access to medicines through the expansion of monopoly powers and limits on competition would be felt for years to come, and would not be limited to the 490 million people living in the U.S., Mexico and Canada. It would be a dangerous blueprint for future agreements.

The use of NAFTA 2.0 to export our high-medicine-price policies to Mexico and Canada reflects an incorrect belief that lower medicine prices elsewhere are the cause of high prices here. This claim contradicts the evidence.<sup>vi</sup> In reality, prescription drug corporations charge high prices in the United States to maximize profits because our current policies provide these firms protections that allow them to do so<sup>vii</sup>, not because of their research & development costs or because of the prices of their products in other countries. In fact, pharmaceutical firms' revenue that is attributable only to higher prices for prescription drugs when sold in the United States than when sold abroad – i.e. the U.S. pricing premium – is greater than those companies' *global* R&D expenditures.<sup>viii</sup>

Instead of exporting high medicines prices to other countries and locking in current U.S. policies by imposing expansive monopoly protections through NAFTA 2.0, we urge legislators to pursue domestic medicine-pricing reforms that would curb monopoly abuses, promote competition, stop price spikes and leverage government negotiating power.

We urge you to demand that the administration eliminate the provisions in the NAFTA 2.0 text that undermine affordable access to medicines in the United States and abroad. It is imperative that NAFTA 2.0 and any other future U.S. trade deals do not thwart domestic reforms to lower prescription drug prices and make medicines affordable and accessible.

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> See Article 29.7: Procedural Fairness

AFL-CIO  
Aging Life Care Association  
Alliance for Retired Americans  
American Family Voices  
American Federation of State, County and Municipal  
Employees American Federation of Teachers American Medical  
Student Association  
American Muslim Health Professionals  
Association of Flight Attendants-CWA  
Business Initiative for Health Policy  
Center for Medicare Advocacy  
Center for Policy Analysis on Trade and Health (CPATH)  
Center for Popular Democracy Action  
Chronic Illness Advocacy & Awareness Group  
Clinicians for Progressive Care  
Coalition to Protect Patient Choice  
Coalition to Reduce Spending  
Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach  
Communications Workers of America  
Community Catalyst `   
Consumer Action  
Consumer Reports  
CREDO Action  
Doctors for America  
End AIDS Now  
Families USA  
Foundation for Integrative AIDS Research  
Franciscan Action Network  
Global Justice Institute  
Health Care for America Now  
Health GAP  
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR)  
International Association of Machinists and Aerospace  
Workers International Brotherhood of Boilermakers  
International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers  
Justice in Aging  
Knowledge Ecology International  
Labor Campaign for Single Payer  
Latinos for a Secure Retirement  
Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns  
Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders USA  
Medicare Rights Center  
Metropolitan Community Churches  
National Advocacy Center of the Sisters of the Good Shepherd

National Center for Health Research  
National Coalition on Health Care  
National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare  
National Education Association  
National Health Law Program  
National Physicians Alliance  
National Women's Health Network  
NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice  
Oxfam America  
Partners in Health  
People Demanding Action  
People of Faith for Access to Medicines  
People's Action  
Presbyterian Church (USA)  
Prescription Justice  
Public Citizen  
R Street Institute  
Raising Women's Voices for the Health Care We Need  
Service Employees International Union  
Social Security Works  
T1International  
The United Methodist Church, General Board of Church and Society  
Treatment Action Group  
Union for Affordable Cancer Treatment  
UNITE HERE  
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries  
Universities Allied for Essential Medicines (UAEM)

cc: Robert Lighthizer, United States Trade Representative

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iii IMS Institute for Healthcare Informatics, Avoidable costs in US healthcare (2013). Available at [www.webcitation.org/6fatM9xnn](http://www.webcitation.org/6fatM9xnn)

iv *Affordable Medications Act.* (S. 3411, 115th Congress). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/senate-bill/3411/text>

v *Improving Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs Act.* (H.R. 1776, 115th Congress). <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/1776/text>

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